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AUTHOR Mayton, Shirley M.; Andersen, Janis F.
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ABSTRACT

A study identified communication characteristics that indicate an individual's perceived ability to offer informal therapeutic relationships to people in a social network. Subjects, 93 male and 130 female students from 16 randomly selected sections of a required speech communication course at a major state university, were assigned to one of three qualitative conditions (good, adequate, and poor) and then were asked to identify an individual in the classroom who exemplified the condition. Results showed that adequate and good helpers were found to be similar to one another, while poor helpers were found to be significantly different from good and adequate helpers. Among other conclusions is that a communicator who is friendly and genuine tends to engage in empathic communication behaviors and is therefore perceived to have empathic understanding ability. Based on the results, a model for a desirable peer helper was created. (A six-page list of references and tables of data are included.) (DF)

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Help Me If You Can: Communication Characteristics Of Acceptable Peer Helpers

Shirley M. Mayton

and

Janis F. Andersen

San Diego State University

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ABSTRACT

This study was interested in identifying communication characteristics that indicate an individual's perceived ability to offer informal therapeutic relationships to those in their social network. Subjects were asked to identify an individual within a specific social network who best fit the description of either a good, adequate, or poor helper. A helper was defined as an individual with whom someone could talk over personal problems. Subjects were then asked to fill out questionnaires concerning their perceptions of the helper's communication behavior. Predictions concerning good, adequate, and poor helper characteristics were based on research taken from the areas of counseling, crisis counseling, friendship, and interpersonal communication. The two research hypotheses predicted that individuals identified as good helpers would be perceived as more warm, empathic, and genuine and also exhibit a more friendly, open, animated, impression-leaving, relaxed, and attentive communicator style than would adequate or poor helpers. Adequate helpers were predicted to rate higher on these qualities than poor helpers. The hypotheses were partially supported. On all dependent variables good and adequate helpers were rated significantly higher than poor helpers. However, no differences were found between those identified as good and adequate helpers on any of the communication characteristics. Based on these results, a model for a desirable peer helper was created.

Interpersonal communication serves a therapeutic function in everyday exchange by providing a means of satisfying physical and emotional needs. Through interpersonal communication individuals build supportive environments for self-disclosure (Brooks & Emmert, 1976; Jourard, 1968; McCroskey & Wheeless, 1976; Rogers, 1975) and create buffers against life stress (Caplan, 1974; Cobb, 1976; Myers, Lindenthal, & Pepper, 1975; Sandler, 1981). In fact, traditional "therapeutic communication" which occurs in psychiatric, clinical, and counseling relationships is considered a form of interpersonal communication (Jackson, 1968; Strupp, 1973). Research has indicated that the therapeutic benefits of interpersonal communication occur in relationships both as a prerequisite for healthy normal development (Brooks & Emmert, 1976; Harlow & Harlow, 1966; Spitz, 1946) and as a necessity for continued health throughout life. Specifically, interpersonal relationships function to maintain psychological health (Caplan, 1974; Pilisuk & Parks, 1981; Rogers, 1957, 1975) and physical health (Cobb, 1976; Myers, Lindenthal, & Pepper, 1975). Research involving the elderly has consistently shown the correlation between interpersonal relationships and mental and physical health (Cohen & Rajkowski, 1982; Perlman, Gerson, & Spinner, 1978; Tesch, Whitbourne, & Nehrke, 1981).

The therapeutic value of interpersonal communication among friends has been a common area of research interest across the disciplines of psychology, counseling, and communication. Research has indicated the importance of peers as a source of therapeutic relationships and support. Armstrong (1969) reported that in times

of stress or crisis, individuals initially seek persons in their social network for aid with problems. For emotional problems, a friend is consistently reported as the first person sought for help (Christensen, Birk, Brooks, & Sedlacek, 1976; Christensen & Magoon, 1974; Dana, Heynen, & Burdette, 1974; Rust & Davie, 1961; Snyder, Hill, & Derksen, 1972; Tinsley, de St. Aubin, & Brown, 1982). Also, Davidson and Packard (1981) reported that women perceived their friendships as serving an ongoing therapeutic function in their lives.

Although research has shown the importance of the therapeutic function of communication between friends that results in enhanced mental and physical health, little research has investigated the interpersonal communication characteristics that define this informal therapeutic framework. Specifically, what are the communication behaviors that constitute a desired and effective therapeutic encounter with a friend? In an effort to further define the role of interpersonal communication within the informal therapeutic framework, the current research investigates interpersonal communicator characteristics that predict the likelihood of a positive therapeutic outcome with a peer.

The Therapeutic Relationship

The elements of therapeutic relationships can be derived deductively from an examination of counseling literature. Since Rogerian therapy directly emphasizes the therapeutic relationship as a crucial medium for client change, its foundation is a good starting point for characterizing the workings of a health-promoting interpersonal relationship. Rogerian or client-centered therapeutic

exchange involves high levels of empathy, warmth, unconditional positive regard and genuineness communicated to the client by a psychologically congruent therapist (Rogers, 1957, 1967). Three of these elements, empathy, warmth and genuineness, have reoccurred continuously throughout the counseling literature and are identified as primary and essential characteristics of therapeutic relationships (Corey, 1982, p. 233; Rogers, 1967, 1975; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967). Empathy, warmth and genuineness are the most frequently identified components of therapeutic conditions (Brown 1974; Carkhuff, 1968; Knickerbocker & McGee, 1973; Shapiro, Foster, & Powell, 1968; Shapiro, Krauss, & Truax, 1969; Shapiro & Voog, 1969), and have been found to be most salient to client improvement (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967, p. 23). Based on research from the professional counseling relationship, empathy, warmth and genuineness are central to a model of professional therapeutic communication.

Less formal counseling situations like crisis intervention also rely on the therapeutic elements of warmth, empathy and genuineness. In situations involving short-term personal problems or crises, the naturally warm and empathic communicator may be the most appropriate and effective counselor (Brown, 1974; Gurney, 1969). In fact, Cobb, (1976) suggested that perceptions of having a supportive and accepting relationship and not therapeutic skill of the helper was the key element in client improvement.

The therapeutic relationship and its components are not restricted to counseling situations. Friendships create a potential for therapeutic relationships and evidence indicates strong reliance on friends for therapeutic intervention. When problems arise (Dana, Heynen, & Burdette, 1974; Candy, Troll & Levy, 1981;

Christensen et al., 1976; Christensen & Magoon, 1974; Rust & Davie, 1961; Snyder et al., 1972; Tinsley et al., 1982). In fact, Armstrong (1969) reported that individuals overwhelmingly chose intimate friends as the first choice for help with problems. Specific research on the therapeutic components of friendship suggests that warmth, empathy and genuineness continue to be important elements of the therapeutic relationship.

Jourard (1968) investigated the therapeutic aspects of friendships putting forth the concept of the inherently helpful person, labeled a "healer", and the inherently harmful person, labeled a "witch." Healers are inherently warm, empathic communicators and habitually help or facilitate those with whom they interact. Witches are characterized by holding negative attitudes such as "people are worthless and life is not worth living" that permeate their interpersonal communication behavior (Jourard, 1968, p. 88). Witches habitually hurt or hinder those with whom they interact. Healers exhibit therapeutic communication behavior while witches exhibit pathological communication behavior such as judgmental statements, double-binds, and disqualifying statements (Raush, Greif, & Nugent, 1979, p. 483).

Based on Jourard's theory of healers and witches, Shapiro and Voog (1969) speculated that an individual spending time with a naturally warm, empathic, and genuine person in the social environment will exhibit positive therapeutic outcomes. Shapiro and Voog (1969) labeled these individuals "inherent helpers", and investigated the effect of a first-semester freshman's "helper" qualities on their roommate's grade-point average (G.P.A.). They found that freshmen communicating high levels of therapeutic conditions would influence

their roommate to have relatively higher G.P.A. with roommate's therapeutic behavior accounting for between 10 percent and 14 percent of the variability in G.P.A. (Shapiro & Voog, 1969). The study also provided some speculation on the effect of the inherently non-therapeutic individuals in the social environment by suggesting that perhaps G.P.A. was not necessarily facilitated by "inherent helpers," but hindered or lowered by non-therapeutic roommates. The hypothesis that individuals may deteriorate without the presence of specific therapeutic elements in a relationship is also supported by the counseling literature (Carkhuff & Truax, 1966).

Discrimination of Helper Qualities

Research on the therapeutic relationship in formal and informal counseling contexts and in friendship relationships suggests an important role for the communication of warmth, empathy and genuineness. If these behaviors are important in differentiating therapeutic potential, do individuals distinguish between friends on these "helper" qualities? Although the evidence is scarce, some research indicates that individuals differentiate between friends on helping dimensions. Pearson (1982) found that individuals made distinctions among those whom they seek for help and support, based on the type of help needed. Also, individuals differentially self-disclose to others based on perceptions of the other's therapeutic potential. Shapiro et al. (1969) found that individuals varied the amount and type of self-disclosure in which they engaged, based on perceptions of the other's therapeutic ability to deal with self-disclosure. Overall, individuals receiving greater amounts of positive self-disclosure were seen as offering higher levels of warmth, empathy, and genuineness.

The ability to discriminate helping qualities suggests that individuals perceive behaviors reflective of effective therapeutic conditions. Both verbal and nonverbal modalities have been investigated as the means through which therapeutic conditions are established (Lee, Hallberg, Kocsis, & Haase, 1980; Reade & Smouse, 1980; Shapiro et al. 1968) and specific verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors have been identified as creating perceptions of therapeutic qualities (Clack, Conyne, & Strand, 1975; Elliott, 1979; Higgins, Ivey, & Uhleman, 1970; Hillison, 1983; Johnson, 1972; Sherer & Rogers, 1980; Toukmanian & Rennie, 1975). Research has indicated that the elements of warmth, empathy, and genuineness are easily and accurately identified through an individual's verbal and nonverbal behavior (Dana et al., 1974; Shapiro, 1968b; Shapiro et al., 1968; Shapiro & Voog, 1969) and may be a basis for differentiating between peer helpers (Shapiro et al., 1969).

Based on the previous literature review, the type of communicator characteristics predictive of a desirable peer helper are those contained within the traditional therapeutic framework. Thus, the following hypothesis is warranted:

> H_1 Those individuals identified as being good helpers will be perceived to be more empathic, warm, and genuine, and will be perceived to engage in more empathic communication behavior than those individuals identified as adequate helpers or poor helpers. Adequate helpers will rate higher along these dimensions than poor helpers.

Communication Style

In addition to traditional therapeutic behaviors, other communicator characteristics may predict perceptions of peer helper ability. The Norton Communicator Style Construct, has been shown to be a

reliable measure of therapeutic communication style (Pettegrew, 1977) and provides an alternative means of characterizing peer helpers (Pettegrew & Thomas, 1978). Research conducted by Pettegrew (1977) and Pettegrew and Thomas (1978) indicated that an assessment of an individual's overall patterns of communication behavior is salient in identifying therapeutic communication style. Based on the results of previous research involving the therapeutic communication style measure, the identification of desirable counselor characteristics, and other therapeutic conditions and characteristics, this study selected six of the ten dimensions of the Norton Communicator Style Measure (Norton, 1978) as applicable in characterizing a desirable peer helper. The rationale for the applicability of these six communicator style dimensions in characterizing a desirable peer helper follows.

Friendly. This dimension reflects encouragement, confirmation, and approachability (Norton, 1978). McGee and Jennings (1973) reported friendliness as an important quality in a peer helper and Hartlage and Sperr (1980) reported friendliness as a desirable trait in a counselor. Support and warmth, reflected in the friendly dimension, are important to the therapeutic relationship (Cobb, 1976; Haywood, 1979; Rogers, 1957, 1975; Shapiro et al., 1969; Wales, 1978). Acceptance, also reflected by the friendly dimension, is reported as being an important quality for both peer helpers and counselors (Parham & Tinsley, 1980).

Open. This dimension reflects honesty, approachability, trustworthiness, self-disclosure, and liking (Norton, 1978). Genuineness is reported as being a central element in the therapeutic relationship

(Rogers, 1967, 1975; Shapiro et al., 1969, Truax & Carkhuff, 1967). Hartlage and Sperr (1980) reported the ability to be frank and honest is a desirable counselor characteristic. Attractiveness, measured in terms of liking, and trustworthiness were reported as important qualities for a peer helper (Corrigan, 1978; Parham & Tinsley, 1980; Strong, 1968).

Animated. This dimension reflects the use of eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions in communicating (Norton, 1978). Research has indicated that immediacy behaviors such as eye contact, smiling, and close proximity, as well as head nodding, gestures, facial expression, and posture are the basis for the communicating of therapeutic messages of warmth, empathy, and genuineness (Hillison, 1983; Lee at al., 1980; Sherer & Rogers, 1980).

Impression-Leaving. This dimension reflects a memorable style of communicating (Norton, 1978). Research has indicated peer helpers are easily identifiable in the social network through their therapy-like communication behaviors (Shapiro & Voog, 1969). Thus, peer helpers are seen to leave an impression on those with whom they interact.

Relaxed. This dimension reflects the level of tension or anxiety in a person's communication style (Norton, 1978). A lack of tension or anxiety in a communicator leaves an impression of self-confidence and emotional congruence. Self-confidence is reported as being a desirable counselor characteristic (Hartlage & Sperr, 1980) and congruence is one of the necessary and essential qualities of a counselor involved in a therapeutic relationship (Rogers, 1957).

Attentive. This dimension of the communicator style construct reflects perceptions of empathic and listening skills. The attentive communicator makes sure the other person knows that he is being listened to (Norton, 1978) and listening behavior is a way of communicating empathy in the therapeutic interaction (Wolvin & Coakley, 1982, p. 120). Empathy has been established as a central element in the therapeutic relationship (Rogers, 1957, 1975; Shapiro et al., 1969). Attending behaviors are also seen as important in therapeutic skills training modules (Clack et al., 1975; Toukmanian & Rennie, 1975).

Previous research indicated that individuals differentiate among helpers in a social environment along the more global construct of communicator style and that the friendly, open, animated, impression-leaving, relaxed, and attentive communicator dimensions are characteristic of desirable peer helpers. Therefore, the following hypothesis is posed:

> H_2 Those individuals identified as being good helpers will be perceived to have more of a friendly, open, animated, impression-leaving, relaxed, and attentive communicator style than those individuals identified as being adequate helpers or poor helpers. Adequate helpers will rate higher on these dimensions than will poor helpers.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Subjects

Undergraduate students in a university required speech communication course at a major state university were the subjects for the study. Sixteen sections were randomly selected and due to class enrollment and attendance, 93 males and 130 females completed the survey. This particular course was selected since the structure of

the course provides an appropriate representation of a small "social network" from which to draw perceptions of peer helpers.

Independent Variable

Three qualitative conditions (good, adequate, and poor) of the independent variable "helper" were established in the study.[1] The induction of the independent variable involved the use of a cover sheet attached to the questionnaire packet, which asked subjects to identify for themselves an individual in the classroom who fit the cover sheet's description of "helper." Subjects were asked to answer a set of questions based on their perceptions of the person whom they identified. Subjects were assigned to one of the three helper conditions through random distribution of the questionnaire packets. Seventy-six subjects completed questionnaires that asked them to identify a good helper within the classroom, 76 subjects completed questionnaires that asked them to identify an adequate helper within the classroom, and 62 subjects completed the questionnaires that asked them to identify a poor helper within the classroom. Participation was voluntary and a greater number of subjects declined participation when they were asked to identify a poor helper, thus reducing cell size for that condition.

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[1]Helpers were defined as being individuals with whom people could talk over personal problems, such as breaking up from a long-term relationship or dealing with feelings of loneliness. "Good helpers" were described in terms of the "best" person with whom to talk over problems. "Adequate helpers" were described in terms of an "O.K." person with whom to talk over problems, not the best, nor the worst, simply an adequate or average helper. "Poor helpers" were described in terms of being the "least desirable" person in the classroom with whom to talk over problems.

A one-item scale used as a manipulation check provided an assessment of validity for the independent variable. The scale asked the subject to assess to helping ability of the person they "kept in mind" while completing the questionnaire along a five point continuum ranging from excellent to poor.

Dependent Variables

Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory. One dimension of the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory was used to assess perceptions of empathic understanding of the identified helpers. The 16-item perceived empathy scale identifies specific communication behaviors that constitute perceptions of empathic understanding (Barrett-Lennard, 1962). For the completion of the scale, the subject is asked to rate an individual's likelihood of engaging in a specified behavior on a six-point scale, ranging from a +3 (strongly true) to a -3 (strongly not true), with no neutral point. Northouse (1978) reported frequent use of this 16-item sub-scale of the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory for the measurement of perceived empathy. Test-retest reliability coefficients ranged from .86 to .91, with split-half internal reliability coefficients ranging from .61 to .94 (Northouse, 1978; Snelbecker, 1967).

Personality Description Inventory. Three segments of the Personality Description Inventory were used to measure subjects' perceptions of the warmth, empathy, and genuineness of the identified helper. This nine-item measure has been implemented in assessing perceptions of warmth, empathy, and genuineness as separate components of therapeutic conditions (Shapiro, 1968a, 1968b; Shapiro et al., 1968) and the nine-item composite measure has been used to assess

overall perceptions of therapeutic conditions (Shapiro, 1968b; Shapiro & Voog, 1969).

Previous research addressing construct validity and test-retest reliability of the P.D.I. has demonstrated its adequacy. For example, in research correlating trained and untrained observers' use of the P.D.I., correlations ranging from .51 to .89 for warmth, .62 to .67 for empathy, and .61 to .78 for genuineness were reported (Shapiro, 1968b). These results not only indicated consistency across raters, but also indicated the validity of using untrained raters to identify therapeutic conditions through the P.D.I. Shapiro et al. (1968) reported test-retest reliabilities of .61 (warm), .75 (empathy), and .79 (genuineness).

The Norton Communicator Style Measure. The Norton Communicator Style Measure (Norton, 1978) was used to measure perceptions of the communication style of helpers on dimensions of attentive, friendly, open, relaxed, animated, and impression-leaving. Items reflecting these six dimensions were taken from the original 61-item version of the scale (Norton, 1978). Slight changes were made in the wording of the items to make the scale other-oriented. The resulting 24-item scale required subjects to respond to statements concerning the identified helper's communication behavior on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The communicator style construct has been adopted for use in the therapeutic relationship as a general measure of therapeutic communicator style (Pettegrew, 1977). Pettegrew (1977) indicated that therapeutic communication style can be accurately reflected through the general communicator style construct based on configural comparisons of both constructs.

Covariate

Relationship Closeness. Three seven-point semantic differential scales were utilized to assess the relationship closeness of the subject and the identified helper. Since previous research has indicated friendship as an intermediating variable in the selection of helper, relationship closeness was investigated as a covariate.

Statistical Analysis

Hypothesis One was examined through the use of a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), utilizing the dependent variables of perceptions of warmth, empathy, and genuineness as measured by the Personality Description Inventory and perceptions of empathic understanding as measured by the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory to form a linear composite. The independent variable consisted of the levels of good, adequate, and poor helper. Univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) were utilized to determine the relationships between each dependent variable and helper condition. These dependent variables found to be significantly different were further probed using Scheffe's test as an *a posteriori* contrast to determine the location of the differences. The overall multivariate effect was assessed via Hotellings Trace. Also, Eta^2 estimates (Cohen, 1965) were computed to determine variance accounted for independently by each variable. The significance level of .05 was established for all statistical analyses.

Hypothesis Two was examined through the same statistical approach. The dependent variables for Hypothesis Two were the communicator style dimensions of friendly, animated, attentive, impression-leaving, open, and relaxed.

Additionally, intercorrelations between all empathy and communicator style variables were assessed. Moderate to high correlations among these variables indicated the use of a stepwise discriminant analysis to determine the best predictors of a good, adequate, and poor helper.

RESULTS

Reliability of Dependent Variables

Internal reliabilities for each of the dependent variables were calculated. Through the Spearman-Brown Prophesy formula (Hull & Nie, 1981, p. 256) split-half reliabilities of .91 for the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory and .83 for the Personality Description Inventory were computed. Nunnally's (1967) 6-18 formula for internal consistency yielded internal reliability estimates of .72 for warmth, .81 for empathy, .67 for genuineness, .48 for open, .72 for friendly, .61 for animated, .66 for impression-leaving, .64 for relaxed, and .59 for attentive.

Validity of the Independent Variables

The manipulation check scale for the independent variable indicated that 18 subjects (2 in poor helper condition and 16 in the adequate helper condition) responded to the questionnaire in an invalid way in that these subjects reported a conception of the helper condition inconsistent with the helper condition induced by the questionnaire. The conservative decision to drop these subjects was made, thus reducing sample size.

Furthermore, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted using the questionnaire conditions of good, adequate, and poor as the

independent variable and the manipulation check scale as the dependent variable. Results indicated significant differences between subjects responding to good, adequate, and poor conditions ($F = 230.78$, $df = 2/211$, $p < .0001$). Means on the validity check scale were 2.16 (below average), 4.12 (good), and 4.19 (good) for those responding to the poor, adequate and good helper condition respectively. A Duncan multiple range test indicated that significant differences were between the poor helper condition and the other two conditions.

Overall Patterns in the Hypotheses Tests

Thb results of the study partially confirmed both Hypotheses 1 and 2. Significant differences were found between helpers for all dependent variables as predicted in the hypotheses. However, these significant differences were found solely between the poor helper condition and the adequate and good helper condition. The adequate helper and good helper conditions were not found to be significantly different from each other on any dependent variable. These overall findings are consistent with findings indicated by the analysis of variance for the manipulation check of helper condition.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1, predicting differences in perceptions of warmth, empathy, and genuineness, and reports of empathic communication behaviors between those seen as good, adequate, and poor helpers, was partially supported. Significant differences were found on the dependent variables between poor helpers and adequate and good helpers, but no significant differences were found between adequate and good helpers. Intercorrelations among the scales measuring perceptions

of warmth, empathy, genuineness, and empathic communication behaviors were high, ranging from .75 to .81 (see Table 1) indicating a multivariate analysis, rather than a series of univariate analyses. The MANOVA procedure yielded a significant F ratio (Hotellings approximate; $F = 69.76$, $p < .0001$), with univariate F tests indicating significant differences for all four of the dependent variables (see Tables 2 and 4).

In order to probe each of these dependent variables for significant differences, one-way analyses of variance and a posteriori contrast utilizing Scheffe's test was conducted for each dependent variable. The analysis of variance was significant for the behavioral empathic communication measure ($F = 176.77$, $df = 2/196$, $p < .0001$), with the Barrett-Lennard scale independently accounting for 64 percent of the variance in perceptions of good, adequate, and poor helpers (see Table 2). The means on the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory for the three conditions of good, adequate, and poor helper were 78.63, 78.55, and 53.75, respectively (see Table 3).

For the Personality Description Inventory subcomponents, the analysis of variance was also significant, with warmth independently accounting for 64 percent of the variance in perceptions of good, adequate, and poor helpers ($F = 173.68$, $df = 2/196$, $p < 0001$), empathy independently accounting for 63 percent of the variance ($F = 169.60$, $df = 2/196$, $p < .0001$), and genuineness independently accounting for 62 percent of the variance ($F = 161.62$, $df = 2/196$, $p < .0001$) (see Table 4). See Table 3 for mean comparisons across the three conditions.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 predicted a difference between communicator style variables of open, friendly, attentive, animated, relaxed, and impression-leaving between individuals identified as being good, adequate, and poor helpers. Hypothesis 2 was partially supported. Significant differences on the dependent variables were found between poor helpers and adequate and good helpers, but no significant differences were found between good and adequate helpers. Intercorrelations between the six factors of communicator style were moderate, ranging from .42 to .78, with all correlations coefficients significant at the .001 level (see Table 1) indicating the use of a multivariate analysis. The MANOVA procedure yielded a significant F ratio (Hottellings approximate; $F = 40.11$, $p < .0001$). The univariate F tests indicated significant differences for all six of the dependent variables (see Table 5).

The analyses of variance were significant for all six of the communicator style variables. The dimension open accounted for 23 percent of the variance in perceptions of good, adequate, and poor helper ($F = 28.76$, $df = 2/196$, $p < .0001$) (see Table 5), friendly independently accounted for 66 percent of the variance ($F = 193.260$, $df = 2/196$, $p < .0001$), animated independently accounted for 34 percent of the variance ($F = 49.82$, $df = 2/196$, $p < .0001$), impression-leaving independently accounted for 25 percent of the variance ($F = 32.63$, $df = 2/196$, $p < .0001$), relaxed independently accounted for 25 percent of the variance ($F = 28.51$, $df = 2/196$, $p < .0001$), and attentive independently accounted for 58 percent of the variance in perceptions of good, adequate, and poor helper conditions (see Table 5). Means on each of the six subconstructs of the Norton Communicator

Style measure for each condition are reported in Table 3.

Discriminant Analysis

A stepwise discriminant analysis for Hypothesis 1 revealed that all four of the dependent variables contributed significantly ($p < .0001$ change in V) to the discrimination of helper condition (see Table 6). The Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory, measuring empathic communication, entered into the discriminant equation first, followed by the Personality Description Inventory subcomponents of genuineness, warmth, and empathy. Overall, 67 percent of the cases were correctly classified, with 92 percent of poor helpers being accurately classified (see Table 7).

The stepwise discriminant analysis for Hypothesis 2 revealed only three of the six communicator style dimensions contributed significantly ($p < .0001$ change in V) to the discrimination of helper (see Table 8). Communicator style dimensions friendly, attentive, and animated entered into the equation, while open, relaxed, and impression-leaving did not. Through the use of the three variables, 70 percent of the overall cases were correctly classified, and poor helpers were most accurately classified (91%) (see Table 9).

Finally, a stepwise discriminant analysis was conducted using the variables found to be significant discriminators in the stepwise analysis of Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2. Six of the seven variables contributed significantly to the discrimination of helper (see Table 10), with warmth failing to significantly contribute to the equation. With these six variables, 74 percent of the overall cases were correctly classified, with poor helpers being correctly classified 95% of the time (see Table 11).

Post Hoc Analysis

Previous research has indicated a relationship between friendship and who individuals seek out for help with their problems (Armstrong, 1969; Christensen et al., 1976; Christensen & Magoon, 1974; Dana et al., 1974; Rust & Davie, 1961; Snyder et al., 1972, Tinsley et al., 1982). Based on this evidence, relationship closeness was suspected to have an effect on scores among the dependent variables which could not be directly attributed to perceptions of communication behaviors. A relationship measure, comprised of a three-item semantic differential scale, was included in the questionnaire to assess relationship closeness with the individual the subject identified as a good, adequate, or poor helper. Scores on the relationship closeness measure were covaried in a series of one-way analysis of variance tests for all dependent variables. Eta^2 estimates were computed for each dependent variable after the covariate of relationship closeness was removed. The results indicated a consistent decrease in the amount of variance explained by the dependent variable when relationship closeness was used as a covariate (see Table 12).

DISCUSSION

Interpretation

The current research attempted to identify differences in perceptions of specific communication behaviors and communicator styles of persons identified as good helpers, adequate helpers, and poor helpers in the social environment. Adequate and good helpers were found not to be significantly different from each other on any of the dependent variables, while poor helpers were found to be significantly different from good and adequate helpers on all dependent

variables. Thus, subjects saw helpers not on a quality continuum, but in terms of acceptable and not acceptable. These findings can be explained through three different perspectives. First, Martin et al. (1966) indicated that adequate facilitative conditions are available in the social environment. Perhaps subjects responding to good and adequate conditions could not make a clear distinction between good and adequate, since adequate is all the social network has to offer.

Second, these results indicate support for Jourard's (1968) conceptualization of "healers" and "witches." Individuals may see peers in terms of facilitating and hindering, based on observations of communication behavior. Little benefit is gained in making a distinction between adequate and good, since adequate and good helpers may be seen as simply acceptable or facilitating individuals, while poor helpers are simply hindering individuals.

Third, perhaps arguing for an individual's good or adequate helper qualities makes little difference if the true discriminator is poor helper qualities. Shapiro and Voog (1969) suggested that perhaps variation in roommate G.P.A. was due not to the inherently helpful individual facilitating G.P.A. but to the nontherapeutic individual hindering G.P.A. This same observation can be applied to the current research. Perhaps the acceptable helper is not identified through higher therapeutic dimensions so much as the poor helper is identified through significantly lower ratings on the positive dimensions. The poor helper is easily identified and "stands out" to a greater degree than the acceptable helper due to the lack of positive communication qualities. The discriminant classification tables indicate poor helpers were accurately classified 90 percent to 95 percent of the time, showing support for this

suggestion (see Tables 7, 9 and 11).

Based on these results, individuals see helpers on two dimensions, acceptable and unacceptable. Means for all dependent variables indicated that good and adequate helpers were significantly more warm, genuine, and empathic, engaged in more empathic communication behaviors, and were seen as having a significantly more open, friendly, animated, impression-leaving, relaxed, and attentive communicator style. Furthermore, the discriminant analysis suggests a parsimonious model of the communication behaviors that contribute to perceptions of acceptable helpers.

A communicator who is friendly (encouraging, supporting, and confirming), genuine (honest and sincere), tends to engage in empathic communication behaviors which lead to perceptions of empathic understanding ability, is animated and tends to be expressive nonverbally in social situations, is empathic in terms of perceptions of sensitivity and concern, and who is attentive and a good listener will be attributed desirable helper status. One who scores low in these dimensions will be identified as an unacceptable helper. Thus, this study suggests a model for an acceptable helper based on communication perception.

Implications

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the current research, the findings have implications for three theoretical areas: the therapeutic function of interpersonal communication, relational communication, and preventative mental health.

Therapeutic Function of Interpersonal Communication. Intercorrelations between all variables were significant, ranging from

moderate to high. The relatedness of the variables indicates an underlying construct of therapeutic communication behavior and provides support for a therapeutic function of interpersonal communication occurring informally in the social environment. This underlying therapeutic function can be identified and measured within the framework provided by the current research.

Along these same lines, results further support the usefulness of the Rogerian or client-centered model in identifying therapeutic peer relationships. Based on the overall predictive model of desirable helper, friendliness (highly correlated to warmth), genuineness, and empathic communication were the three highest discriminators. This indicates that traditional Rogerian therapeutic elements prevalent in formal counseling approaches are also salient to therapeutic relationships occurring informally between peers.

The results of this study provide support for Pettegrew's (1977) suggestion that Norton's communicator style construct can be used as a general structure for the measurement of specific therapeutic perceptions. In the current research, correlations between communication style dimensions and traditional therapeutic dimensions suggests that a relationship exists between overall communication patterns and perceptions of therapeutic elements. The communicator style dimensions of friendly and animated are highly correlated ($\leq .78$) with empathy, warmth, and genuineness.

Additionally, these findings are useful both in identifying those individuals perceived to be capable or not capable of offering a therapeutic function to others. Not only can peer helpers be identified through the model created by the current research, but individuals wishing to function as peer helpers, crisis counselors, or peer

counselors can focus on those characteristics which make a desirable helper. Specifically, a friendly and animated communicator style is not addressed in peer counselor trainings (Clack et al., 1975; Toukmanian & Rennie, 1975), yet was found to be important to perceptions of desirable helpers.

Also, the identification of poor helper characteristics may be useful. If individuals are judged as being less friendly, genuine, empathic, attentive, and animated, they are likely to be avoided and isolated. They are seen as non-approachable and as potentially poor helpers, based on their communication behavior. If individuals wish to change these negative perceptions, specific communication skills training in the areas mentioned above would aid them in becoming more positive and approachable communicators.

Relational Communication. Perhaps the potential for friendship with an individual must exist prior to the individual being identified as an acceptable helper. A desirable helper is primarily identified as a friendly communicator, based on the stepwise discriminant for the overall model. Jones and Brunner (1981) reported that a friendly and attentive communicator style (both discriminating variables in the overall model of desirable helper) were the best predictors of attraction and liking in individuals. Also, research has indicated that attraction and liking are important and desired factors in peer helpers (Corrigan, 1978; Parham & Tinsley, 1980; Strong, 1968). The current research supports these results. Likability and attraction may be indirect predictors of helper desirability and may indicate a predisposition toward friendship with someone seen as an acceptable helper.

The primacy of friendliness as a discriminator for helper quality suggests that a friendship or potential for friendship is a prerequisite for helping. This indicates the therapeutic relationship as a secondary occurrence after the initial establishment of an interpersonal relation. Whereas interpersonal relationships develop over time with friends, counselors must work toward establishing initial rapport through the use of empathy to quickly establish similarity and communicate understanding. Therefore, the function of empathy as a means of relationship development in both formal and informal therapeutic relationships may be worthy of exploration.

Although empathy is considered a salient element in the therapeutic process and in establishing a therapeutic relationship (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967; Rogers, 1957, 1975), some research has indicated that empathy may not be as important or desired in a friendship. Whereas counselors offer heightened levels of empathy, as measured by reflective listening, this behavior occurs rarely in helping encounters between friends (Martin, Carkhuff, & Berensen, 1966; Reisman & Yamckowski, 1974). In fact, individuals preferred friends to be more directive and expository in their statements. The Eta^2 estimates reported in this study seem to support these indications to some extent. Relationship closeness as an intermediating variable causes empathy to become less of a discriminator among helper types, while if the covariate of relationship closeness is removed, empathy becomes a greater discriminator. This evidence indicates that perhaps relationship closeness and empathy measures similar elements in therapeutic interactions. Perhaps empathy serves the same function that an ongoing relationship between friends also serves, that of establishing experiences and understanding

which to base a relationship (Strong, 1968). Empathy is important to therapeutic conditions by establishing understanding and commonality. Although empathic skills have been demonstrated to be rare among friends, the results of the current research indicate that empathy is an important quality in a desirable peer helper. Previous studies suggesting otherwise were not supported. However, empathy, as well as the other dependent variables, become less of a discriminator in quality of helper in established relationships. Consequently, friendship may be somewhat of a substitution for therapeutic elements, due to shared understanding and intimacy inherent in an interpersonal relationship.

Preventative Mental Health. The identification of qualities that make a good peer helper are important for increasing the availability of preventative mental health conditions in the social environment and for the identification of a therapeutic communication role operating in the social network. Dewine (1976) argued that the general population needs to be trained in therapeutic skills, yet only those who have natural therapeutic ability are successfully trained within a short time period (Brown, 1974; Knickerbocker & McGee, 1973). Specifically in situations which may require therapeutic intervention, such as freshman dormitories, retirement homes, and skilled nursing facilities, a more expedient way to increase the availability of therapeutic conditions in these social environments would be to target those individuals already seen as desirable helpers and used by others in that function, and focus on them for training to increase the facilitative conditions they provide.

In the general population, such preventative mental health measures

may be hard to implement. However, since peer therapeutic communication is an important and prevalent function of interpersonal communication, communication skills training programs should focus in part on therapeutic interpersonal skills in an effort to enhance both communicator competence in all interpersonal situations as well as interpersonal effectiveness in therapeutic situations.

Raush et al. (1979) indicated that patterns of communication behaviors consistent within the individual create a communication style, but communication behaviors can also be context specific and form a communication role. The peer helper may be performing a role based not only on their communication style, but also on context specific behavior, that of providing therapeutic communication behaviors in crisis situations. Therefore, the concept of helper as a needed and functional communication role may be fruitful in preventative mental health. Future research investigating the availability of informal therapeutic relationships and the competency of individuals in providing this relationship may provide important ramifications for those interested in enhancing general social welfare and mental health.

Future Research

Although the current research supported the selection of the client-centered viewpoint as an appropriate framework through which to view peer helpers, other research has indicated friends offer more suggestions, advice, and directions than counselors (Reisman & Yamokoski, 1974) and that perhaps a more directive approach is expected from friends (Davidson & Packard, 1981) than may be indicated by the client-centered approach. Thus, the use of another orientation,

one of which is more directive and confrontive, may show alternative results. Based on principles found in behavioral and rational-emotive theory, peer helpers may challenge the behaviors and thoughts of a friend in order to help them deal with crisis situations. A comparison among therapeutic principles offered through alternate counseling theories would determine the most applicable to peer therapeutics.

This research was limited by measuring perceptions of communication behaviors rather than actual behaviors. Future research should implement videotaping and behavioral coding for comparison of the communication behaviors of individuals seen as acceptable and unacceptable helpers. The investigation and identification of communication behavior involved in the informal helping relationship should lead to more effective training procedures and a more accurate understanding of the therapeutic function of interpersonal communication.

This research has attempted to both answer and generate questions concerning the role of informal therapeutic interpersonal communication. It is hoped that the current research will generate more of its kind, in an effort to increase our knowledge, both of the function and role of interpersonal communication in the social environment, as well as of the communication mechanisms involved in mental health and social well-being.

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Table 1

Correlation Matrix--Intercorrelations Between Dependent Variables*

	Barrett-Lennard	Warmth	Empathy	Genuineness	P.D.I. Composite	Open	Friendly	Animated	Impression-Leaving	Relaxed	Attentive
Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory	-										
Personality Description Inventory:											
Warmth	.79	-									
Empathy	.81	.84	-								
Genuineness	.76	.84	.81	-							
P.D.I. Composite	.84	.95	.95	.93	-						
Communicator Style Measure:											
Open	.42	.52	.43	.39	.48	-					
Friendly	.77	.85	.76	.71	.82	.54	-				
Animated	.48	.50	.45	.41	.48	.55	.56	-			
Impression-Leaving	.39	.36	.35	.33	.37	.44	.49	.63	-		
Relaxed	.45	.47	.39	.37	.44	.42	.51	.48	.47	-	
Attentive	.76	.70	.71	.68	.74	.47	.79	.56	.49	.50	-

*All correlations statistically significant at the .0001 level.

Table 7

Analysis of Variance--Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory by Condition

Source	DF	SS	MS	F	P	Eta^2
Between Groups	2	25874.3295	12937.1647	176.771	.0001	.64
Within Groups	196	14344.4544	73.1860			
TOTAL	198	40218.7839				

Table 3

Means Across Three Helper Conditions--All Dependent Variables

Variable	Good Helper*	Adequate Helper*	Poor Helper*
Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory	78.6329	78.5500	53.7500
Personality Description Inventory:			
Warmth	18.4937	18.0667	10.6667
Empathy	17.6962	17.9667	9.4833
Genuineness	18.6329	18.2500	11.4833
P.D.I. Composite	54.8278	54.2833	31.6333
Communicator Style Measure:			
Open	19.1646	18.4333	13.4167
Friendly	23.6329	22.2000	11.7833
Animated	21.3924	20.7500	14.0333
Impression-Leaving	21.1899	20.8500	15.6333
Relaxed	19.9620	19.3833	13.2500
Attentive	21.0759	20.0167	12.1667

*Means for good and adequate helpers were not found to be significantly different.
*Means for good and poor helpers were found to be significantly different ($p<.0001$).
*Means for adequate and poor helpers were found to be significantly different ($p<.0001$).

Table 4

Analysis of Variance--Personality Description Inventory

Source	DF	SS	MS	F	P	Eta^2
			Warmth by Cordition			
Between Groups	2	2454.1815	1227.0907	173.677	.0001	.64
Within Groups	196	1384.8135	7.0654			
TOTAL	198	3838.9950				
			Empathy by Condition			
Between Groups	2	2910.2840	1455.1420	169.602	.0001	.63
Within Groups	196	1681.6255	8.5797			
TOTAL	198	4591.9095				
			Genuineness by Condition			
Between Groups	2	2049.3620	1024.6810	161.628	.0001	.62
Within Groups	196	1242.5878	6.3397			
TOTAL	198	3291.9497				
			P.D.I. Composite by Condition			
Between Groups	2	22096.4749	11048.2374	241.259	.0001	.71
Within Groups	196	8975.6357	45.7941			
TOTAL	198	31072.1106				

Table 5

Analysis of Variance--Communicator Style Measure

ource	DF	SS	MS	F	P	Eta^2
			Open by Condition			
etween Groups	2	1254.9583	627.4791	28.761	.0001	.23
thin Groups	196	4276.1774	21.8172			
OTAL	198	5531.1357				
			Friendly by Condition			
etween Groups	2	5356.3446	2678.1723	193.260	.0001	.66
ithin Groups	19[illegible]	2716.1378	13.8578			
OTAL	198	8072.4824				
			Animated by Condition			
etween Groups	2	2115.9008	1057.9504	49.822	.0001	.34
ithin Groups	196	4162.0188	21.2348			
OTAL	198	6277.9196				

Table 5 (continued)

Source	DF	SS	MS	F	P	Eta^2
			Impression-Leaving by Condition			
Between Groups	2	1230.4758	615.2379	32.629	.0001	.25
Within Groups	196	3695.7352	18.8558			
TOTAL	198	4926.7111				
			Relaxed by Condition			
Between Groups	2	1761.5801	880.7900	28.505	.0001	.23
Within Groups	196	6056.3194	30.8996			
TOTAL	198	7817.8995				
			Attentive by Condition			
Between Groups	2	3032.1514	1516.0771	137.515	.0001	.58
Within Groups	196	2160.8610	11.0248			
TOTAL	198	5193.0151				

Table 6

Step-Wise Discriminant Analysis--Hypothesis 1

Variable	Wilk's Lambda	Rao's V	Change in V
Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory	.3567	353.54	353.54
Personality Description Inventory:			
Genuineness	.2787	505.80	152.26
Warmth	.2621	549.70	43.90
Empathy	.2530	569.74	20.04

Significance < .0001

Table 7

Classification Table for the Discriminant Analysis--Hypothesis 1

		Predicted Groups		
		1	2	3
Actual Groups	1	*91.7%/55	6.7%/4	1.7%/1
	2	1.7%/1	56.7%/34	41.7%/25
	3	5.1%/4	39.2%/31	55.7%/44
		66.83% of cases correctly classified		

*Percentage/Number of cases correctly classified

Table 8

Step-Wise Discriminant Analysis--Hypothesis 2

Variable	Wilk's Lambda	Rao's V	Change in V
Communicator Style Dimensions:			
Friendly	.3365	386.52	386.52
Attentive	.2961	466.05	79.53
Animated	.2844	492.82	26.77

Significance < .0001

Table 9

Classification Table for the Discriminant Analysis--Hypothesis 2

		Predicted Groups		
		1	2	3
Actual Groups	1	*90%/54	10%/6	0%/0
	2	3.3%/2	56.7%/34	40%/24
	3	5.1%/4	29.1%/23	65.8%/52
		70.35% of cases correctly classified		

*Percentage/Number of cases correctly classified

Table 10

Step-Wise Discriminant Analysis--Variables Found Significant in Step-Wise Analysis of H_1 and H_2

Variable	Wilk's Lambda	Rao's V	Change in V	p<
Communicator Style; Friendly	.3365	386.52	386.52	.0001
P.D.I.; Genuineness	.2485	589.95	203.43	.0001
Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory	.2224	673.26	83.32	.0001
Communicator Style; Animated	.2052	746.12	72.86	.0001
P.D.I.; Empathy	.1982	766.91	20.79	.0001
Communicator Style; Attentive	.1948	779.84	12.93	.0016

Table 11

Classification Table for the Discriminant Analysis--Variables Found Significant in Step-Wise Analysis of H_1 and H_2

		Predicted Groups		
		1	2	3
Actual Groups	1	*95%/57	5%/3	0%/0
	2	1.7%/1	65%/39	33.3%/20
	3	2.5%/2	31.6%/25	65.8%/52

74.37% of cases correctly classified

*Percentage/Number of cases correctly classified

Table 12

Eta^2 Comparisons for Dependent Variables With Relationship Closeness Covaried

Variable	Without Relationship Closeness Covaried Eta^2	With Relationship Closeness Covaried Eta^2
Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory	.64	.39
Personality Description Inventory:		
Warmth	.64	.28
Empathy	.63	.37
Genuineness	.62	.31
P.D.I. Composite	.71	.36
Communicator Style Measure:		
Open	.23	.08
Friendly	.66	.34
Animated	.34	.20
Impression-Leaving	.25	.17
Relaxed	.23	.14
Attentive	.58	.34